

Seeing "Red" on Duxbury Beach

Beach parking is a hot issue in town this summer and not just because temperatures are soaring.

Selectmen are hearing numerous complaints that increased out of town vehicle parking is impacting town residents use of the beach. With a first-come, first-serve policy, green sticker pride can quickly turn to red sticker envy when town residents get bumped by out of town visitors.

Due in part to protection of endangered species and subsequent related beach closings in other towns, Duxbury's out of town oversand sticker sales have dramatically increased. So have sales overall, which are 24 percent higher than last year.

Combine one of the hottest summers in recent memory with a town imposed 500 vehicle parking limit on the outer beach and nearly 8,000 sticker sales and you have a recipe for frustration all around.

Town Manager Rocco Longo is recommending an ad hoc study committee look at resolving the permit/parking problem with a committee made up of representatives of all the organizations that are involved with the beach -- The Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc., the Town Beach Committee; selectmen; fiscal advisory staff including the town accountant, assistant treasurer and town fiscal committees; the harbormaster; police and fire officials; and citizens at large. State legislators and Audubon are also potential players in the resolution since endangered species protection issues impact parking restrictions.

Before the sand settles on the issue and the exasperation between the "green and red sticker people" threatens to become a Hatfields versus McCoy situation, a little history is in order.

Duxbury Beach is a 4 1/2 mile barrier beach separated from the mainland by Duxbury Bay. It is privately owned by the Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., which annually leases it (for \$100,000) to the town which in turn issues beach vehicle permits, provides police protection and the conservation officers to patrol the beach throughout the year.

Both the town and the Reservation jointly provide beach management and law enforcement services. It is currently managed under a beach management plan prepared by the town and the Duxbury Beach Committee. In addition to these caretakers, the Duxbury Beach Preservation Society, a committee of the Reservation, raises funds to support the beach and provides volunteers for beach related activities.

At least three times in the past century, the state has attempted to take over the beach, but each time the Duxbury community rallied in protest and the beach remained in private hands. In the 1970's the Duxbury Beach Association, a group of citizens who formed to protect the beach, turned over beach ownership to the non-profit charitable Duxbury Beach Reservation which still owns it today.

The purposes set forth by the Reservation are to preserve the ecology of the beach as a barrier beach for the protection of Duxbury, Kingston and Plymouth and to make the beach available as a recreational beach for the benefit of the residents of Duxbury and the general public.

Management of the beach necessitates balancing the needs and demands of divergent user interests including ecological preservation, general recreational use, controlled beach use and the public right of way which provides the only access by land to the Gurnet and Saquish areas of the town of Plymouth.

The bottom line is that Duxbury Beach is in good hands and we want to keep it that way. Exclusionary policies are not the answer. Perhaps limits on sticker sales or new parking regulations are in order.

Reservation officials and the appointed committee will study the problem and tackle this latest crisis. We should trust in their good sense to preserve and protect this priceless asset while fairly providing for the enjoyment of the citizens of Duxbury and the general public.